



# Harding Fine Arts Academy

Oklahoma City, OK | Barry Schmelzenbach, principal

**Grades Served:** 9-12 ■ **Enrollment:** 375 ■ **Year Opened:** 2005-2006

**Instructional Strategies:** Fine arts, college prep

**Student Demographics:** 56% White; 21% Black; 9% Hispanic; 9% American Indian; 5% Asian; 58% FRL eligible

## A Mission to Serve

Harding Fine Arts Academy (HFAA) is a college preparatory high school in Oklahoma City that focuses on the integration of arts and academics. Community leaders and fine arts advocates founded HFAA with the mission “to provide an arts-enriched learning environment merging aesthetic and academic content to enhance student achievement and to encourage arts-related careers and lifelong arts appreciation.” Students take classes in required academic subjects, including mathematics, English, science, and social studies, and can also select up to three elective classes in dance, music, theatre, or visual arts programs. Principal Barry Schmelzenbach said, “We’re very elective heavy for a school our size, which means that our students get a wide range of opportunities to take classes that they wouldn’t be able to in a traditional public school setting.”

Students are exposed to Oklahoma City’s finest artists and musicians who serve as instructors, advisors, and artists-in-residence. As mathematics teacher Jennifer Burris notes, “Our community does a fantastic job of supporting our school. We have a rich and vibrant arts district inside of Oklahoma City. Those artists really believe in what we’re doing here and want to help our students achieve all of their goals—whether it be artistic or something else post-high school.”

In addition to an appreciation for artistic endeavors, the schools emphasizes values of empowerment, innovation, leadership, and teamwork. Students are respected for their differences and sharing their unique experiences, which school leaders believe creates a more successful, creative, and strong community and individual.

## From Vision to Reality: How CSP Funds Enabled Harding Fine Arts Academy to Open

HFAA opened in 2005 with a 9th grade class, and grew by a grade level each subsequent year. The school opened with \$25,000 raised from the community and founders. Once the school opened its doors, a grant from the state legislature and per-pupil funding kicked in. “It’s disconcerting to start out with no buffer,” Mr. Schmelzenbach said about HFAA’s initial shoestring budget.

HFAA received a \$174,000 startup grant in 2007 through the federal Charter Schools Program (CSP). Mr. Schmelzenbach remarked that, “by the time we reached our third year—where we had freshman, sophomores and juniors—our student population had grown dramatically. Being able to access those federal funds made a major impact on our ability to meet the needs of our students.”

Mr. Schmelzenbach further commented that, “as a charter school, we receive no facilities funding. All of our allocations for anything that we

## STATEWIDE IMPACT

- Recognized as the first “A+” High School by the Oklahoma Dept. of Education
- Ranked as a top ten public high school in Oklahoma by *U.S. News & World Report*

*“My favorite part about attending HFAA is definitely the community of students around me... Here, everybody is just very supportive of all the arts. I feel like that’s something very special to this school.”*

— Veronica Bryant, senior



do, whether that's hiring a teacher or for building a new library, all of that comes directly out of our per-pupil funding. The federal CSP grant that we received enabled us to do everything from build and grow our programs, to being able to purchase appropriately sized furniture for our students. We began with desks that were really meant for middle school students."

The impact of the CSP funding was profound. As Mr. Schmelzenbach stated, "without the CSP funding, we would be years behind where we are right now. In the ten years we've operated, we have been able to provide an opportunity for students where we are now ranked as one of the top ten high schools in the state. We would not have been able to reach that level this quickly without the CSP funding."

### Looking to the Future

HFAA would like to expand to be able to provide an arts integration model to more Oklahoma City students. HFAA is currently capped at serving 500 high school students. Ideally, HFAA would like to replicate into another high school and create a fine arts middle school.

To help actualize HFAA's expansion plans, Mr. Schmelzenbach believes that "Congress can best support our school by being able to provide that facilities funding that we can't get anywhere else. We can't issue bonds; we can't increase taxes; we can't do any of that. So anytime we want to grow, it has to come from private donations as of now. Providing facilities funding for charter schools would make a huge impact on our ability to just be at that same level that a traditional public school is."

### Heard in the Halls: Teacher, Parent, and Student Perspectives



"Even though this is an art school, it's not about turning out artists. This is about turning out people who are responsible within their communities, who give back, who can go on and seek higher education, and have a meaningful career. It doesn't matter if it's medicine or engineering, the arts integration is going to benefit them long term."

—Kay Wetmore, parent



"Through attending HFAA, everything that is unique about you will just flourish. It's like a seed is planted in you freshman year, and by the senior year you're this big blossomed tree."

—Anthony Clark, senior



"I have the freedom at this charter school to be able to take the standards that my students need to learn, along with and those skills and objectives, and tailor them to fit my students' needs and how they're going to learn best."

—Jennifer Burris, algebra and geometry teacher

## IN THE COMMUNITY

- Students participate in at least 20 hours of community service each year
- Parents must volunteer 20 hours a year to the school
- HFAA hosts the Art Spark Youth Art Competition to recognize Oklahoma City elementary and middle school students' hard work and talent, and their school's efforts to provide an enriched education

